

US Congress Outlines New Phase of Economic Attacks and Hybrid War on Nicaragua's Sandinista Government

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The US Congress invited neoconservative regime-change strategists to discuss the next stage of hybrid warfare on Nicaragua's Sandinista government, which will likely involve creating an economic blockade, refusing to recognize the legitimacy of President Daniel Ortega, and borrowing tactics the Trump administration used in its coup attempt in Venezuela.

A [House Foreign Affairs Committee](#) hearing on September 21 set out plans for the next phase of the United States' hybrid warfare on Nicaragua, which aims to destabilize and ultimately overthrow the Central American nation's leftist Sandinista government.

The event featured hardline neoconservative members of Congress, a senior State Department official, a prominent Nicaraguan regime-change activist, and the former president of Costa Rica.

The carefully staged spectacle made it clear that Washington will be expanding its brutal economic war on Nicaragua as the country's general elections approach in November. This will take the form of more aggressive financial sanctions, through legislation called the [RENACER Act](#). These sanctions could potentially expand into a [de facto blockade](#) modeled after the [US embargo of Venezuela](#).

US officials stated explicitly that Washington will refuse to recognize the legitimacy of the November elections. The panelists also suggested that the Joe Biden administration may even refuse to recognize the legitimacy of President Daniel Ortega and the Nicaraguan government itself, and will pressure other countries in Latin America to cut diplomatic ties as well.

The hearing indicates that the Biden administration plans to repurpose many of the same tactics that the Donald Trump administration employed in the coup attempt it initiated

against Venezuela in 2019, such as refusing to recognize the constitutional government of President Nicolás Maduro, [appointing unelected US asset Juan Guaidó as supposed “interim president,”](#) and broadening the sanctions initiated by the Barack Obama administration into a full-on economic blockade.

While the Biden administration is continuing the hard-line anti-Nicaragua posture taken by Trump, the State Department officials crafting these policies appear to know very little about the country.

As she spewed inflammatory rhetoric demonizing the Sandinista government as “authoritarian,” US Deputy Assistant Secretary Emily Mendrala comically referred to Nicaragua as an “island,” leading a member of Congress to correct her for apparently confusing the Central American nation with Haiti.

As she plotted ways to suffocate Nicaragua with sanctions and overthrow its Sandinista government, US State Department Deputy Assistant Secretary [@EMendrala](#) called it an “island”...

Shows how little they know about the countries they're trying to destroy:
<https://t.co/deKFHklurF> [pic.twitter.com/tqO9OR3RXF](https://t.co/tqO9OR3RXF)

— Ben Norton (@BenjaminNorton) [September 25, 2021](#)

Other participants made similarly absurd comments, demonstrating their ignorance of the reality on the ground in Latin America. Congressman Juan Vargas, for instance, farcically insisted that Fidel Castro, who died in 2016, is still alive and in power in Cuba, and “he’s been there a long time.”

While the event represented a laughable display of colonial arrogance, the consequences of Washington’s emerging agenda are likely to have serious consequences for Nicaragua and its people. Indeed, the State Department has emphasized that the Biden administration is working closely with the European Union, Canada, Costa Rica, and the Organization of American States (OAS) to destabilize the Sandinista government.

Together, they plan to expel Nicaragua from the OAS and isolate it diplomatically. They also hope to cut off the country’s trade with the United States and starve it economically.

The overblown rhetoric spouted by the panelists was complemented with fear-mongering about Russia’s alliance with Nicaragua, which they referred to with classic colonial framing as “the US doorstep.”

The hearing also highlighted a growing and increasingly influential right-wing Nicaraguan-American lobby, and its direct coordination with extremist Cuban-American elements in Florida.

LIVE NOW - join to hear [@HouseForeign](#) question [@BertaValle](#), [@RyanBergPhD](#), [@Laura_Ch](#), and [@StateDept](#)’s Emily Mendrala about U.S. strategy toward Nicaragua. <https://t.co/Nlf00vLNvo>

— House Foreign Affairs Committee (@HouseForeign) [September 21, 2021](#)

US Congress pledges more aggressive sanctions on Nicaragua

This 2021, the Nicaraguan government arrested a series of right-wing opposition activists who orchestrated a violent coup attempt that devastated the country's economy and society in 2018.

During the failed putsch, extremists waged a campaign of terror in Nicaragua, hunting down Sandinista activists, injuring, torturing, and killing hundreds. For months, criminal elements erected dozens of barricades known as *tranques*, in various parts of the country, while waging a low-intensity civil war against the Sandinista government.

President Daniel Ortega recognized that the US-backed coup-mongers were intentionally stoking violence, and wanted to invite a government crackdown that they could use to justify international intervention – a strategy that [Hong Kong separatists openly advocated](#) in a similarly failed US-backed destabilization operation.

So Ortega ordered police not to leave their stations, which led the foreign-funded coup-mongers to besiege Nicaraguan police stations and try to kill as many security forces as possible.

The powerful political and economic figures behind this bloody coup attempt finally faced legal consequences in 2021, and were arrested by the Nicaraguan government.

Yet the US government was furious at these detentions, because Washington had cultivated, trained, and funded these coup leaders, over years and with millions of dollars.

The [House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing](#) on September 21, titled “An International Response to Ortega’s Destruction of Democracy in Nicaragua,” was occasion for the US government to announce its plans to punish the Sandinista government for arresting its Nicaraguan assets.

The meeting was hosted by Representative Albio Sires, a right-wing Cuban-American Democrat who had joined Florida’s neoconservative former Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen in writing the NICA Act, legislation that called for a de facto financial blockade of the Sandinista government.

Today, I held a [@HouseForeign](#) hearing on the corrupt Ortega regime’s actions to prevent competitive elections, eliminate the political opposition, and imprison anyone who stands in their way in [#Nicaragua](#). See my opening statement: <https://t.co/0n82YmCVVs>

— Albio Sires (@RepSires) [September 21, 2021](#)

The [NICA Act was passed in December 2018, without any opposition in Congress](#). The bill represented the first round of crushing US sanctions on Nicaragua.

Sires and his neoconservative colleagues in the Congress are however not content with the economic warfare that Washington is already waging against Nicaragua. They want more.

In the September 21 hearing, he called for the US government and European Union to impose even more aggressive sanctions on Nicaragua and “begin preparing a number of

severe diplomatic consequences,” including suspending the country from the Inter-American Democratic Charter and Organization of American States.

Sires is the co-sponsor of a follow-up to the NICA Act, known as the [RENACER Act](#), which will expand the unilateral coercive measures targeting Nicaragua’s economy, while also ratcheting up US spy operations in the country.

In the Senate, the legislation has been spearheaded by Bob Menendez, another right-wing Cuban American Democrat who played a significant [role in the US-backed coup in Bolivia in 2019](#), as well as Senator Marco Rubio, the Republican representative of far-right Cuban-Americans in Miami.

[Menendez and Rubio have lobbied hard](#) to expand US sanctions and increase aggressive tactics against Nicaragua, using the OAS to punish the country.

This June, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved the RENACER act, although it has yet to be officially voted on.

The September 21 hearing made it clear that, despite protests by peace activists in Washington, the RENACER will soon be rammed through Congress with little opposition, thus escalating the US economic war on Nicaragua.

Now at US Capitol, a protest against the Renacer Act, which aims to destabilize Nicaragua and remove its elected govt through economic warfare.

The sanctions build on the US-backed 2018 insurrection attempt that saw right-wing gangs target Sandinistas with torture & murder.
pic.twitter.com/yzbwD3IAQg

— Max Blumenthal (@MaxBlumenthal) [September 13, 2021](#)

Joined Sires in the meeting was committee ranking member Mark Green, a Republican representing Tennessee who is co-sponsoring the RENACER Act.

While Green was unable to pronounce the names of the US-backed Nicaraguan coup leaders he described as “political prisoners,” he revealed that members of the Foreign Affairs Committee “regularly meet” with figures from the right-wing anti-Sandinista opposition to coordinate tactics.

Florida Republican Congresswoman María Elvira Salazar, a Cuban-American representative of the most fanatical far-right forces in Miami, also held forth during the hearing.

Salazar insisted that Washington must intervene much more aggressively in Latin America, claiming, “The United States is not present in this hemisphere! Period.”

Salazar held up photos of Felix Maradiaga, Arturo Cruz, and Juan Sebastián Chamorro, US government-backed Nicaraguan regime-change activists who played a crucial role leading the violent 2018 coup attempt.



Far-right Florida Congresswoman María Elvira Salazar holding up photos of US-funded coup leaders Felix Maradiaga and Arturo Cruz at a hearing on Nicaragua

Representatives Joaquin Castro, a Democrat from Texas, and Juan Vargas, a Democrat from California, joined the chorus of condemnation as well.

Vargas lamented that US regime-change operations targeting Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua have repeatedly failed, complaining, “We do a whole lot of things to try to get rid of them, and we’re not very successful... We did a whole lot of damn things against all these guys, and they still seem to survive.”

In a comment that showed how little he actually knows about Latin America, Vargas then suggested that Fidel Castro, who died five years ago, is still alive and has “been there a long time. I mean we wanted to get rid of him for a long time. We’ve done lots of things to try to get rid of him, but we can’t get rid of him.”

US State Department vows escalation against Nicaragua

The deputy assistant secretary of the State Department’s Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, Emily Mendrala, spoke proudly in the September 21 hearing about Washington’s political attacks on Nicaragua’s Sandinista government.

“We continue to work with governments throughout the region, through the OAS and otherwise, to continue” putting pressure on Nicaragua, she said. “We are also working closely with the EU, Canada, and the UK to coordinate additional targeted measures.”

Mendrala “welcomed the bipartisanship” in the campaign against Nicaragua, and boasted that the US government has maintained support for right-wing opposition activists and media outlets, stating, “Through USAID, we continue to support Nicaraguan civil society, independent media, and human rights defenders.”

She also revealed that the US State Department “launched a social media campaign in August” against the Sandinista government.

Mendrala went on to take credit for a June statement in the OAS condemning Nicaragua.

“Through US leadership, we were we were able to secure a very important coalition of 26 member states” to support the anti-Nicaragua OAS resolution, she said.

Quoting [Secretary of State Antony Blinken](#), Mendrala claimed that Nicaragua’s “electoral process, including its eventual results, has lost all credibility,” making it clear that Washington will not recognize them.

Reading closely from written statements accusing Nicaragua of using “Russian-inspired laws to carry out repression,” Mendrala’s comments reflected the neoconservative tenor of the Biden State Department.

Rep. Mark Green interjected to chastise Mendrala for insufficiently zealous rhetoric.

“I would encourage you to say ‘the Ortega regime,’ because I’m not sure that it’s really legitimate,” the Republican said. “In fact, I think it’s not, I’m convinced it’s not a legitimate government.”

At one point, Mendrala even mistakenly referred to Nicaragua as an “island,” raising questions about her knowledge of the region’s most basic geographical contours.

“You called Nicaragua an island a minute ago,” Rep. Andy Levin corrected Mendrala. “I think you’re referring to the poorest country in the atmosphere, Haiti.”



US President Barack Obama with Costa Rica President Laura Chinchilla in 2013

Costa Rica’s former president calls for escalating hybrid warfare on Nicaragua

The inclusion of Costa Rica’s neoliberal former President Laura Chinchilla in the Congressional hearing reflected the Biden administration’s close coordination with Nicaragua’s US-backed neighbor to destabilize the Sandinista government.

Chinchilla echoed the extreme commentary of her US counterparts, citing “Ortega’s military strategy of increasing cooperation with Russia” to dub Nicaragua “a threat to regional security.”

The Costa Rican leader said Nicaragua must be expelled from the OAS, and called for a de facto economic blockade, “in order to stop immediately the external supply of financial oxygen to the Ortega regime.”

She also called for targeting the military, noting that “the Nicaraguan army [is] a key player in the endurance of the regime.” This was a not-so-subtle hint that Washington should curry favor with Nicaraguan generals to try to overthrow President Ortega.

Drawing on a [US strategy used against Venezuela](#), Chinchilla then suggested that Washington should charge top Nicaraguan government officials with “money laundering and drug trafficking,” a patently absurd accusation.

She also suggested Washington should “deny legitimacy to the government” of Nicaragua, again echoing the US tactic of refusing to recognize the legitimacy of Venezuela’s constitutional government.

Today, Chinchilla is co-chair of the influential DC-based lobby group the Inter-American Dialogue. This February, she participated in a [panel of neoliberal Central American officials](#) at the corporate-backed think tank. It was joined by Biden’s special envoy to the region, Ricardo Zúñiga, and convened to cement the administration’s Central America policy.

The February event had hinted at tactics Washington and its regional clients would use to destabilize Nicaragua, including potentially recognizing US government-funded multimillionaire oligarch Cristiana Chamorro as a Juan Guaidó-style “interim president.” (The Sandinista government foiled those plans by [arresting Chamorro on charges on money laundering](#).)

Rubio tuvo el honor de reunirse con las esposas de [@Jschamorro](#) y Felix [@Maradiaga](#), quienes permanecen arbitrariamente desaparecidos por el régimen de [#Ortega](#). Nos unimos a la lucha de estas valientes mujeres y su pedido para que liberen a sus esposos de inmediato. [#SOSNicaragua](#) [pic.twitter.com/dVWDevyebo](#)

— Senator Rubio Press (@SenRubioPress) [July 20, 2021](#)

Elite right-wing Nicaraguan regime-change activist lobbies for more aggressive actions

Also starring in the Congressional hearing was right-wing Nicaraguan activist Berta Valle, the wife of coup leader Felix Maradiaga, a US-trained political operative who played a major role in the failed 2018 coup attempt.

Maradiaga, who grew up and was educated in the United States, has long been cultivated by the US government with the goal of destabilizing the Sandinista government.

Although his support base in his homeland is tiny, and he is despised by Sandinista supporters who hold him responsible for destabilizing the country over three years ago, Maradiaga has remained a top US government asset.

Incubated in the bowels of elite corporate-funded neoliberal institutions like the [World Economic Forum](#), Maradiaga has led a series of NGOs and think tanks, such as the Institute for Strategic Studies and Public Policy (IEEPP), which use plentiful funding from CIA cutouts

to wage hybrid warfare against the Nicaraguan government.



US-funded Nicaraguan coup leader Felix Maradiaga and his wife Berta Valle at the World Economic Forum

Like her husband, Valle was trained by the World Economic Forum, a notorious symbol of the global financial oligarchy. Valle is a proud part of the WEF's [Global Shapers Community](#), an international initiative to create neoliberal leaders who then push right-wing policies around the world that benefit the large corporations and billionaire plutocrats who fund the WEF.

A privileged member of Nicaragua's miniscule class of wealthy elites, Valle made her name as a media personality at the country's major right-wing outlets, such as Vos TV.

In her testimony in the Congressional hearing, Valle acknowledged that the Nicaraguan "government is alleging that Felix [Maradiaga] and others were part of a global conspiracy to use foreign resources, including from the US Agency for International Development, the International Republican Institute, and the National Endowment for Democracy, to harm the interests of the nation."

That they did this is undeniable; it is an objective fact. Public records show that the organizations led by Maradiaga, such as IEEPP, have received huge sums of money from these CIA cutouts.

Here is top USAID/NED "pro-democracy" grantee Felix Maradiaga (white shirt) at Nicaragua's UPOLI with fellow coup planners including Pio Arellano, accused member of Viper criminal network waving a pistol in the air.
pic.twitter.com/uqigHnYqTu

— Max Blumenthal (@MaxBlumenthal) [August 8, 2018](#)

It is quite ironic that Valle mentioned these charges as if they were ludicrous, because the Nicaraguan justice system's accusations against Maradiaga and other US-backed coup leaders were in fact confirmed by what the State Department official, Mendrala, said in the very same hearing.

Moreover, the [State Department itself boasted](#) in a public statement on September 14 that "the U.S. Government continues to support civil society organizations, human rights defenders, and independent media" in Nicaragua. Valle's husband Maradiaga has been one of the top recipients of this foreign material support.

In her remarks, Valle also revealed that she has been coordinating with top members of the US government, and insisted on more US meddling in Nicaragua.

In July, Valle and other right-wing Nicaraguans traveled to Washington to meet with members of Congress, including Marco Rubio.

Today, Valle lives in the United States, and, with the active support of the US government, has been working to construct an anti-Sandinista Nicaraguan-American lobby to complement the power of the anti-revolution Cuban political machine in Miami. Already, her efforts and those of her patrons in Washington are bearing fruit, with an escalated economic war on her country of birth.

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